

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

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1. A method of treating a T cell-mediated or T cell-dependent autoimmune disease in an animal comprising orally or enterally administering to said animal autoantigen, biologically active fragments of autoantigen, or analogs structurally related to autoantigen specific for said autoimmune disease, in an amount effective to treat said autoimmune disease.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein said autoimmune disease is selected from the group consisting of myasthenia gravis, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes mellitus, systemic lupus erythematosus, multiple sclerosis, autoimmune hemolytic anemia and autoimmune thyroiditis.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein said autoimmune disease is a contact sensitivity disease.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein said contact sensitivity disease is induced by plant matter.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein said plant matter is from poison ivy.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein said oral or enteral administration to said animal occurs prior to the onset of said autoimmune disease.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein said oral or enteral administration to said animals occurs subsequent to the onset of said autoimmune disease.
8. The method of claim 6, wherein said treatment prevents the onset of said autoimmune diseases in said animal.

✓ 9. The method of claim 7, wherein said treatment suppresses the symptoms of said autoimmune diseases in said animal.

✓ 10. The method of any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein said animal is a human.

✓ 11. The method of claim 1 wherein said autoantigen is administered orally.

✓ 12. The method of claim 1 wherein said autoantigen is administered enterally.

✓ 13. The method of claim 2 wherein said autoimmune disease is multiple sclerosis.

✓ 14. The method of claim 2 wherein said autoimmune disease is rheumatoid arthritis.

✓ 15. The method of claim 13 wherein said auto-antigen is MBP, a biologically active fragment of MBP or an analog of MBP.

✓ 16. The method of claim 15 wherein said biologically active fragment of MBP is the non-encephalitogenic fragment of MBP.

✓ 17. The method of claim 16 wherein said non-encephalitogenic fragment of MBP comprises amino acids 1-37 of MBP, or a biologically active portion thereof.

✓ 18. The method of claim 17 wherein said biologically active portion of MBP comprises the region between amino acids 5 and 20.

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19. A polypeptide comprising amino acids 1-37 of MBP, a biologically active fragment thereof, or an analog thereof.

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